

Pow WOW!

Each year all over the United States, American Indians come together for gatherings called pow wows. A pow wow is a big party. Most pow wows last a few hours, but some can last a whole week! At the pow wow, people from a tribe sing, dance, make new friends, and eat special food.

Pow wows take a lot of planning! Everyone practices a lot before the big day. On the day of the pow wow, people gather in a circle around the dance arena. This is where the dancers, singers, and drummers participate. Here are some of the people who make a pow wow a success:

- **The Arena Director** makes sure everything is happening when it is supposed to during the pow wow. The director makes sure dancers are dancing on time, singers are singing the right song, and that the dance arena is ready for the participants.
- **The Master of Ceremonies (MC)** tells everyone what is going to take place next. Between dances, the MC tells the audience jokes and stories.

Song and Dance

The pow wow starts with the **Grand Entry**. This is when all of the dancers dance onto the dance arena to the beat of the drummers. There are many dancers, from little children to adults. All dance



together—it is a colorful sight! After the Grand Entry, each group dances its own dance.

Different tribes are known for different dances. In some of the dances, the dancers move like animals that are special to the tribe, like buffaloes, snakes, or butterflies. And when tribes visit each other for pow wows, they often hum their songs so people can learn the melody. Every pow wow has a dance that everyone, including visitors, can join in and dance with the drummers.

Dance Clothing

Dancers at pow wows wear special American Indian clothing. The Jingle Dress is a dance dress with little metal cones on it. When the dancer moves, the little cones sound like rain falling. The Fancy Shawl dancer uses a cape with long pieces of fringe that twirl and whirl and look like a butterfly when the dancer twirls around. Feathers and beads are all important decorations in dance dress for both men and women.



Pow Wow Manners

When you go to a pow wow you need to be sure to follow proper **etiquette** like:

- Be there on time, especially if you are dancing or performing.
- Wear appropriate clothing.
- Stand during songs when the flag is displayed.
- Always ask permission before taking pictures of dancers.

Pow wows are a way for American Indian people to meet, make new friends, and visit with old friends. But best of all, the pow wow is a way for American Indians to continue to celebrate with dance and song.